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ABSTRACT

This comparative historical study examines political centralism in China in the Imperial Examination and the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). Both systems served the political needs of the ruling classes and the commoners, although in a limited way for the latter. The Imperial Examination was once a positive force for social development and the NCEE may become an obstacle for political and economic reform if it continues in its current role. Both examinations have contributed to the continuity of political centralism through elite and higher education. The Imperial Exam selected officials for civil services and the NCEE selects students for higher education. Academic requirements are completely different in that the past exam required mirroring of Confucian concepts and rigid rules of composition while the NCEE covers almost all subjects of modern secondary education. The quota systems of the imperial exam were accepted without much complaint while the current quotas have caused many grievances. Finally, those who succeeded through the Imperial examination were loyal to the Emperor while those who succeed under the NCEE have many grievances toward the government. Proposed reform for NCEE looks for greater centralization. The paper argues that NCEE should become a pure educational testing service limited to providing academic assessment. (Contains 66 references.) (JB)

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From The Imperial Examination To The National College Entrance Examination: The Dynamics Of Political Centralism In China's Educational Enterprise

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationships between political centralism and the Imperial Examination in imperial China and the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in the People's Republic of China. A brief history of the two systems is given. The purposes, characteristics, strengths and limits of the two systems are discussed. The relationships between the two systems and Chinese education, the relationships between the two systems and Chinese political systems, and the relationships between the two systems and the common people are also discussed. These discussions lead to the understanding that the two systems have served the political needs of both the ruling classes and the commoners (although it has been limited for the latter), and contributed to the continuity of political centralism. The NCEE is still indispensable but it needs reform.

Table of Contents

Introduction ii

The Imperial Examination System 1

A Brief History of the Imperial Examination 1

The Purposes of the Imperial Examination 2

Characteristics of the Imperial Examination Administration 3

The Orientation of Education by the Imperial Examination 4

The Abolition of the Imperial Examination 6

Strengths of the Imperial Examination 8

Limits of the Imperial Examination 9

The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) 10

A Brief History of the NCEE System 10

The Purposes of the NCEE 12

Characteristics of the NCEE Administration 14

The Orientation of Secondary Education by the NCEE 19

Strengths of the NCEE 20

Limits of the NCEE 21

Reflections.....22

Political Centralism 23

Similarities Shared by the Two Examination Systems 24

Differences Between the Two Examination Systems 26

The Future of the NCEE 28

Bibliography.....32

Introduction

In 1977 when China reinstituted the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) which was discontinued during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the whole nation celebrated it as an educational renaissance in, and the hope for, this country (*Guangming*, 1977; Zhao, 1985). This system has been considered critical for China's political, economic, and educational development both by the government and the people. Unlike any other systems of the nation, it is still functioning with little challenge from the present reform movement which calls for democratization and decentralization of the nation's political and economic system.

Numerous works have been published on the impact of the NCEE on the advancement of science and technology. There are also writings on the technical, administrative, psychological, and socio-economic problems caused by it (Xu, 1980; Shu, 1985; Tong, 1985; Ye, 1985; Zhang, 1987). However, the political centralism connected with this system has not yet been discussed by any Chinese scholar.

Some international scholars who are interested in Chinese education have noticed it and the similarity between the NCEE and the Imperial Examination in imperial China: "Central to China's traditional culture was a clear conception of the structure and organization of knowledge ... that contributed to the remarkable continuity of the Chinese imperial system ... even after the Imperial Examination system was abolished and the empire was overthrown" (Hayhoe, 1989, p. 9). Here the phenomenon is seen, but it is unclear what forces have backed the continuity of political centralism in Chinese education with a focus on highly centralized examinations.

There are many works on the failure of the Imperial Examination to advance science and technology towards modernization, the great waste in educational investment, and the psychological damage to people who were involved in it in this country (Wu, 1963; Deng,

1967; Lu, 1973; Miyazaki, 1976; Cheng, 1981; Gu, 1981; Hayhoe, 1989). However, very few people have studied the longevity of this system from a broader point of view that scanned the interests of both the rulers and the populace concerned. What, for instance, may have influenced the legislation of Confucianism and contributed to the long existence of political centralism in China.

There is the need to make a comparative study of the Imperial Examination and NCEE in order to know what have been the dynamics of political centralism in the Chinese educational enterprise. It is necessary to study the relationships between the examination systems and the people, and the relationship between the two systems and the Chinese education in different historical periods. Such a study will lead toward a better understanding about the factors that have affected the existence of political centralism in China. It will shed light on the traditional relationship of Chinese scholarship with politics. It will help non-Chinese people understand better the Chinese culture and society. It will benefit the Chinese people with an improved view of what problems they have in their present education system, especially in higher education which is considered critical to the modernization of politics and economy in this country.

The Imperial Examination System

The Imperial Examination was a highly centralized testing system to select officials for civil services. It was designed and used by Chinese emperors. It operated on the principle that officials must be selected on the basis of ability and intellectual achievement rather than of birth. It provided the emperors the best choices of personnel to govern the country through empire-wide selection. It provided opportunities to commoners to compete with the privileged for social mobility. It was not an educational system, but it effectively oriented the country's education for about thirteen hundred years, leaving its mark on many aspects of the Chinese culture and society as we see today (Cheng, 1934; Jiang, 1934; Elman, 1991).

A Brief History of the Imperial Examination

The Imperial Examination system was started by Emperor Wen Di (541-604) of the Sui dynasty (581-618) in 587 A. D. It was reinstituted by Emperor Tai Zong (r 626-649) of the Tang dynasty (618-907), and succeeded by the emperors of all dynasties as the major approach to select civil service personnel. It became mature in organization, and began occupying a central institutional position in the imperial government and society in the Song dynasty (960-1279). It reached its climax of complicatedness and stiffness in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), and was abolished in 1905 by Emperor Guangxu (1871-1908) (Cheng, 1934; Jiang, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976; Gu, 1981; Zhen & Zang, 1984).

The structure of this system was consistent with the imperial hierarchy. In the beginning years it was a simple two-tiered system. By the Qing dynasty it was developed into a very complicated empire-wide testing network. Its organization was like a pyramid with the final palace test at the top and the county test at the bottom. It proceeded from the bottom to the top with a series of tests. Applicants took the county test, prefecture test,

provincial test, capital test, and lastly the palace test. Most of them would be screened out level by level before they could take the final one (Zhen & Zang, 1984; Miyazaki, 1976).

There were attempts to improve or change this system, but all failed. The chief minister Wang An-shi (1021-1086) for Emperor Shen-zong (r. 1068-86) of the Song dynasty once tried to replace examination success with graduation from official schools for civil services. It was strongly resisted by his colleagues as well as his people. Efforts to reform the system during the Ming dynasty were also suppressed. In the last years of Qing dynasty there were lots of appeals to reform the Imperial Examination, although it was too late. During the long dynastic period, changes of this system were very few and minor but the autocratic control over its administration was ever strengthened (Elman, 1976; Miyazaki, 1976; Gu, 1981).

The Purposes of the Imperial Examination

The initial purpose of instituting this system was to reduce the privileges of the hereditary aristocrat families that threatened the imperial autocracy. When Emperor Yang Di took the crown of a newly reunited China from his father Wen Di (541-604), he needed to assert his authority in the face of the old aristocratic families that had dominated China during the preceding period of disunity. He needed to find loyal bright brains to help him control the empire. The Imperial Examination for civil services was therefore established (Elman, 1991).

The emperors quickly found that officials selected by open examinations served as a useful countervailing force to the power of entrenched aristocrats in imperial politics. They also found that it was a powerful instrument to collect and control people who were capable and ambitious. When Emperor Tai Zong observed the new officialdom candidates walking from the examination building in lines, he was overjoyed and exclaimed: "The heroes of the empire are all in my pocket!" (Cheng, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976).

Another major purpose of the emperors was to select loyal and capable officials from the populace through open testing but not by the recommendations of other officials from privileged families. It opened a door for ambitious commoners to take part in the empire's political life because it was open to all qualified applicants regardless of their social backgrounds. The examination experience assured an unconditional loyalty of the officials to the emperors. Emperor Tai Zong started the tradition of "palace examination" given by the emperor himself as the final step to select officials. This particular procedure cemented the master-disciple relationship between the emperor and the candidates (Miyazaki, 1976; Zhen & Zang, 1984; Elman, 1991).

This system was not an educational testing system. It was not designed to provide education to the masses, nor did it aim to promote education in the empire. But it engendered an elite education by the people but for the Courts. The emperors never cared about mass education. The concept of public education was not introduced to the Chinese culture until the turn of this century, when foreign forces invaded China (League of Nations'..., 1932; Jiang, 1934; Gu, 1981; Schirokauer, 1976).

Characteristics of the Imperial Examination Administration

Administration of this system involved (1) anonymity, (2) a quota policy, (3) social discrimination, and (4) rigidness in forms and contents.

Anonymity in testing and evaluation had been demanded since the Song dynasty. The examinees' names were covered and sealed so that they were unidentifiable by the evaluators. The evaluators would be severely punished if they showed favoritism or cheated. This policy was welcome by the commoners, for "the stricter the Examinations were, the more hope for the commoner examinees to move up" (Cheng, 1934, p. 11). They believed that it was the measure of fairness that guaranteed an equal access to success for all examinees (Cheng, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976; Gu, 1981; Elman, 1991).

The quota policy controlled the ratio of success to failure in different geographic areas and ethnic groups. It was a "one stone to kill three birds" policy: first, it intervened in the distribution and composition of the elite; secondly, it extended the autocratic control to every corner of the empire; thirdly, it was a royal grace to people in less-developed regions so that they could be represented in the imperial administration (Gu, 1981; Elman, 1991).

Social discrimination began in the Tang dynasty. Until the Ming dynasty, sons of merchants, prostitutes, Taoists, and Buddhists were not allowed to take the Imperial Examination because they were considered not to possess sound morality. In the Qing dynasty, an applicant for the capital test was required to have a father who had passed the provincial test. Women were never allowed to take the Imperial Examination. The political credentials of an applicant required investigation upon applying for the initial county test. An applicant must provide information about his family history up to his grandfather, and this information required affirmation by honorable witnesses (who usually were the local officials or the masters of prestigeful families) (Cheng, 1934; Elman, 1991; Zhang, 1994).

Rigidness in forms and contents was the most noted deficit of this system identified by the Chinese themselves, which probably contributed to its being dismissed as an institutional obstacle to the modernization of this country. Its testing contents were always Confucian classics but nothing else. It had extremely rigid requirements on styles and forms. An examinee would be degraded if he liked math, science, or technology, or if he wanted to be creative in composing (Huang, 1963; Miyazaki, 1976; Gu, 1981).

The Orientation of Education by the Imperial Examination

Education survived in imperial China because of the Imperial Examination system. Although it was not an educational system itself, it had a dominant influence over the development of education which in turn affected the characteristics of Chinese society, especially as related to the state and cultural factors (Jiang, 1934; Elman, 1991).

It oriented people's educational goals toward a single end of becoming government officials as it was the most honorable and the most worthwhile profession in the society. The desire for wealth and power motivated people to invest in education with whatever they had. The only purpose of academic effort was to succeed in the Examination. The objectives of such efforts were limited to the studies of Confucian classics as this was the only subject to be examined (Jiang, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976; Gu, 1981).

It led people to take responsibility to provide education not for themselves but instead for the Courts. Being satisfied that it was efficient and economical to select personnel through examinations, the emperors had no interest in setting up more schools or training teachers but simply strengthening examination administration. This was why for such a long time private schools, such as *shishu* or *shixue*[1] and *shuyuan*[2], existed as the major source for the country's education. Such educational effort "represented the focal point in the Chinese society through which the emperor/state interests, family strategies, and individual hopes and aspirations were directed" (Elman, 1991, p. 10).

The Imperial Examinations led to curriculum standardization in education across the whole country through the requirement of a mastery of Confucian orthodoxy. Confucian classics, such as the Five Classics and Four Books[3] were the basic testing materials

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1 *shishu* or *shixue* were private schools which were small in size and low at academic levels.

2 *Shuyuans* were private or semi-private institutes of higher quality, but not public schools or universities by any means (Gu, 1981; Cheng, 1934), as was exaggerated by some Chinese scholars (Cheng, 1981; Xiong, 1983). This kind of institute was similar to the Buddhist temples in organization but functioned as libraries, schools, and places to worship sages like Confucius. They were financed by the central or local governments from time to time, but basically they got support from private sources. The core curricula were the same as that in other schools.

A few *Shuyuans* once advocated not to study for the Imperial Examination but for pure academic interest or personality improvement. However, they all concentrated in the study and legislation of Confucian orthodoxy. None of them was ever discontented with the imperial right to determine social hierarchies with Confucian doctrines through the Imperial Examination. They continuously made themselves better preparatory schools for the Imperial Examination. In this way they identified their interests with that of the emperors, helped Confucianize the Chinese culture, and supported the highly-centralized imperial structure in the Chinese society (Jiang, 1934; Gu, 1981).

3 The Five Classics were the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The Four Books were the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean.* , the *Analects of Confucius*, and *Mencius* (Beijing Foreign ..., 1986; Elman, 1991).

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because "Confucian literacy was the only criterion for literati prestige, state power, and cultural practice" (Elman, 1991, p. 8). The Chinese culture was quickly Confucianized. Political centralism--the core of Confucianism, became the only acceptable regime in this country when the emperors successfully equated "social and political order with moral and political indoctrination" in people's mind (Elman, 1991, p. 11).

This system oriented the Chinese value system with Confucianism as the measure of people's moral and social worth. Loyalty was the most important virtue. It required unconditional sacrifice of oneself to an authority, whether it be an emperor, a parent, or a husband. In the society officialdom was the most honorable profession. Math was for business people and business was a dishonest engagement. Art and craftsmanship was for mean hands. Education was to cultivate scholars for officialdom. A centralized testing system was the warranty for equality and fairness in competition. The central power must be respected for not only justice, but also mercy, honor, position, and wealth. Such a value system nurtured the Chinese characteristics of absolute obedience to, and dependency upon, autocracy. People learned to respect the emperors' wills and behaved in a way as was expected by them. The most educated elite who helped radiate the imperial control over the empire was the most obedient and dependent group to the central power (Cheng, 1934; Jiang, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976; Elman, 1991).

The Abolition of the Imperial Examination

Not until the final years of the 19th century did the Chinese realize that the Imperial Examination had a negative influence on social development. What led to the abolition of this system was not that it was deficient in selecting officials, but that the educational system it engendered could not meet the needs for social and technical development. The Chinese rulers were unwilling to consider the importance of science and technology and an

appropriate educational system for this country until the Opium War[4] (1840-1842) and then the Sino-Japanese War[5] (1894-1895) when China was forced to face a more advanced world. The Qing Court at last recognized, too late as history would later show, the limits of the Imperial Examination and the importance of systematic education for the masses.

A few scholars such as Kang You-wei (1858-1927) and Liang Qi-chao (1873-1929) who had studied abroad brought back new ideas and advocated reform. They appealed to the Court to change the political system, support industry, encourage commerce, develop science and technology, and establish a new educational system for the masses. Senior officers such as Zhang Zhi-dong (1837-1907) and Yuan Shi-kai (1859-1916) co-appealed to Emperor Guangxu for abolition of the Imperial Examination (Zhen & Zang, 1984). They reported to the Emperor that many students still "do not want to study sciences in the 'new schools'; they just want to read and write stereotype essays in order to succeed in the Imperial Examination" (Huang, 1963, pp. 138-139).

During the One-Hundred-Day Royal Reform in 1898, Emperor Guangxu ordered changea in all provincial, town, and county *shu yuans*, no matter how large or small they were, into schools where both Chinese classics and Western sciences must be taught. In his imperial decree the Emperor said:

> Jing Shi Da Xue Tang[6] now has been established as I ordained. The students must accomplish academic learning from primary to secondary and then to further higher level. Based on the situations that there are *shu yuans* in all provinces, cities and counties, and that not all provinces have set up

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4 This was the war between China and Britain. In the first half of the 19th century Britain illegally exported to China too much opium, causing serious social problems to the Chinese. In 1839 the Qing Court sent an Imperial Envoy to Guangdong to ban opium-smoking and the opium trade. The Envoy forced the British and American smugglers to hand over more than 1185 tons of opium and destroyed it. Thus came the war that China lost (Zhen & Zang, 1984).

5 This was a war between China and Japan. In 1894 the Korean government appealed to the Chinese Qing Court for military help to suppress a Korean peasants' rebellion. The Qing Court sent troops to Korea. Japan said it would like to help the Koreans, too, and sent troops there. In July of that same year Japanese troops attacked Chinese troops in Korea. In August the Sino-Japanese War began. In October Japan invaded China. By February of 1895 the Royal Navy of the Qing Court was totally defeated by the Japanese Navy. China lost the war (Zhen & Zang, 1984).

6 This was the original name of Beijing University.

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> primary and secondary schools, I require all my Imperial Envoys to urge and supervise all local officials ... to change all *shu yuan*s into schools where Chinese classics and Western sciences must be taught together. Large *shu yuan*s in provincial capitals must be changed into institutions of higher learning; those in towns into secondary schools; and those in counties into primary schools (in Cheng, 1981, p. 124).

This was the first time in the history of China that a framework was proposed for a national education system, and that higher learning was distinguished from primary and secondary education. This proposal was the beginning of systematic education in China. In 1905 Emperor Guangxu decreed the abolition of the Imperial Examination and ordered national education reform. It did make a start for modern education in China, although the reform was soon aborted. In 1906, the Qing Court issued the first law of mass education in China's history. It did not go into effect, but it marked the awakening of the Chinese for public education (Jiang, 1934; Ding, 1961).

Strengths of the Imperial Examination

Three major strengths were associated with this system: it offered commoners opportunities for social mobility, it was trustworthy for people, and it protected social stability and the unity of the empire.

This system offered commoners opportunities for social mobility, although it was limited. It served the political needs of both the ruling class and the common people with its dual beneficial function. With this system the emperors strengthened autocracy. In it the populace saw opportunities to move up. Without the consensus that it would benefit each side it might have been overthrown and disappeared early in history.

The administration of this system established an unshakable reputation of fairness in evaluation and was trustworthy for people. It was considered indispensable for officialdom selection. "The faith the Chinese people had in the Examinations, and the honor they showed to the scholars who succeeded in them, attest the general trust in the system's

fairness" (Miyazaki, 1976, p. 119). This faith supported the longevity of this system and molded the tradition of nationally unified testing in Chinese educational evaluation.

This system lent strength to the emperors to protect social stability and the unity of the empire. It limited the power of the prestigious aristocrats. It made the capable and ambitious identify their interests with autocracy and willingly serve the Courts. It unified the language used around the country. Furthermore, it standardized people's ideology and behavior around Confucianism. It guaranteed the presence of different geographic areas and ethnic groups in the imperial administration, although such presence was limited (Elman, 1991).

Limits of the Imperial Examination

Two major problems are identified with this system. First, it limited people's educational experience to Confucianism only, which impaired the social and technical development of this country. Secondly, it cultivated the tradition of blind obedience to, and complete dependency upon, a central power in the Chinese society.

The Imperial Examination deprived the Chinese people of any possibility to learn new things by confining their education to the study of Confucianism. Science and technology were excluded from people's educational experience. Any creation or innovation was unwelcome in this system. Social and technical development was brought to standstill as aspirations for creation were missing and inquiry was dead (Cheng, 1934; Jiang, 1934; Gu, 1981).

This system cultivated the tradition of blind obedience to, and complete dependency upon, imperial autocracy for justice and gratuity in the Chinese culture. It was believed by many Chinese scholars that this tradition was one of the negative strengths responsible for the backwardness of the Chinese society. Although this characteristic of the culture has been strongly criticized by many famous Chinese scholars, such as Bo Yang (1982) and Lu

Hsun (1973), its connections with the Imperial Examination, the education systems and the educational experience of the Chinese people have been neglected.

The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE)

The NCEE is a highly centralized educational testing system designed to select high school graduates for regular higher education. It was established by the central government after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the Communist Party of China (CPC). All applicants for higher education must take the NCEE, which not only examines their academic preparation but also investigates their family backgrounds, political standpoints, physical health, and religious backgrounds. All regular institutions must recruit through this system. It is connected with the life-long employment and government placement systems which not only assure every graduate a career but also job safety. It has oriented the nation's secondary education with all the benefits it promises. It has greatly influenced educational development in this country with all its positive and negative strengths especially from the central power.

A Brief History of the NCEE System

This system was established in 1952 under the Ministry of Education. At that time the CPC central government closed all missionary schools and restructured all institutions of higher learning nation-wide after the Soviet model. But it did not want to follow the Soviet pattern in recruiting college freshmen. Instead, it developed the NCEE system based on the Admission System[7] model proposed by the Jiang Jie Shi government in 1939 (although this heritage will never be acknowledged by the CPC). Like this model, the

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7 In 1939 Jiang Jieshi's National Party government issued a set of "Regulations of University Administration" which included a national admission system to higher education. It did not become established at that time because of the wars and the powerful resistance from the missionary institutions sponsored by foreign powers. This system was characterized by traditional centralism. According to the Regulations, a National College Admission Committee was to be formed under the Minister of Education, and a standardized national testing service to be set up to guarantee the quality of candidates for higher education (Xiong, 1983). Later it became the unique model for both Jiang's government in Taiwan and Mao's government on the mainland.

NCEE was also a typical product of Chinese political centralism derived from the Imperial Examination system but for different purposes.

The NCEE was discontinued during the Cultural Revolution[8] . Since its reinstitution in 1977, it has become the largest standardized educational testing system in the world. In 1977, it had 5.7 million examinees; in 1979, the number was 4.6 million; in 1992, 2.28 million; in 1993, it was 2.8 million (Seybolt, 1979; State Education Commission, 1987; *Ren min ri bao--eople's Daily*, 1991; *World Journal*, 1993). It has been considered critical for China's political, economic and educational development. Unlike any other systems of the nation, it is still functioning with little challenge from the present reform movement which calls for democratization and decentralization of the nation's politics and economy.

This system has been under close control of the central government. Before 1984 it was under the Ministry of Education which was upgraded as the State Education Commission (SEC) in 1985. After 1987 the Examinations Administration Center became a part of the SEC (State Education Commission, 1987).

In its early years the NCEE was a simple two-tiered system: the Minister of Education prepared the examination questions and made admission decisions; the local educational officials conducted the examinations and evaluation, and then sent the scores to

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8 The NCEE was discontinued during the Cultural Revolution. From 1966 to 1971 none of the Chinese higher institutions recruited students. From 1972 to 1976 after Richard Nixon's visit to China, some institutions were allowed to reopen a few three-year programs in foreign languages, applied science and technology, Chinese history, and politics. These institutions dispatched admission representatives to the cities and counties where their admission quotas were assigned. They worked with local officials and made admission decisions based upon their recommendations. Academic preparation meant little, but political qualification was critical for admission. A "red" family background was essential for an applicant to be recommended.

A small number of so-called Worker-Peasant-Soldier (WPS) students were admitted to higher education during the Cultural Revolution. Most of the WPS students were sons and daughters of the Communist Party cadres at various levels of the power pyramid. By 1976, at most 10 percent of the WPS students were truly young workers, peasants, or soldiers.
The majority of the Chinese people were deprived of the right to higher education during this period. The prevailing corruption among government officials in the admission process made it a source of resentment against the government. On October 20, 1977, the Minister of Education announced the recruitment reform, including reinstitution of the NCEE (Smerling, 1978).

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the Minister in Beijing. In 1954, admissions were made in Beijing with six Greater Administrative Regions as admission units. They were Northern China, Eastern China, Southern China, Mid China, South-West China, and North-West China. Since 1958, except during the Cultural Revolution, admissions have been made by the admission bureaus at the provincial level (Wei, 1985).

The present NCEE system is a four-level structure. Its administrative units are organized pyramidally in light of the political system. At the State level is the National Admission Bureau which decides the number of freshmen to recruit annually for the nation, the admission quotas for different provinces, the examination questions, and the criteria of admission. The provincial-level[9] admission bureau issues the NCEE authorizations to the applicants, distributes examination papers, supervises administrating the examinations, conducts evaluation, and makes admission decisions. The city/prefecture[10] admission offices collect personal files of the applicants, and make admission recommendations to the provincial bureau after the examinations. There is a bottom-level admission office in each county which investigates applicant qualifications and administrates the examinations. The bottom-level offices are also responsible to screen out unwanted applicants for political, academic or health reasons. Every year about one fifth of the high school graduates will be denied the right to take the NCEE by the county-level offices. The purpose of doing so is to reduce the workload on the NCEE.

The Purposes of the NCEE

The first purpose of the NCEE, according to the official statement by the CPC government, is to select youths for higher education who are politically trustworthy, academically well-prepared, and physically healthy, so that they can be trained as "red

9 Within this context, the concept "provincial-level" covers all provinces, the Autonomous Regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang, and the three municipalities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin.

10 At the prefecture level, the admission offices do not distribute examination papers. They are powerful in recommending candidates for admissions because they are in charge of candidates' personal files.

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experts" for socialist construction and the modernization of China. Therefore, all applicants must pass political investigations and health examinations before they take the NCEE. Political investigations screen out those who have criminal records, or records of "political mistakes and/or problems." Health examinations screen out those who have physical disabilities or health problems. The NCEE evaluates applicants' academic preparations in different subject areas. The questions of politics are specifically designed to measure their commitment to the CPC belief in Marxism (Ministry of Education, 1957; 1979; NCNA, 1978; Smerling, 1978; National People's Congress, Article 2, 1980; Xinhua News Agency, 1981; Center for Educational Examinations, 1992a).

Another openly declared purpose of the NCEE is to "unite whomever possible to build our socialist motherland." The first group to be "united" after the Cultural Revolution is the professionals--the Chinese call them "intellectuals"--such as professors, scientists, school teachers, doctors, and engineers, who suffered during the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution. The Party needed their knowledge and skills badly and called for their patriotism in making contribution to the motherland. The reinstitution of the NCEE showed them that the Party had become willing to consider that academic achievement was as important as class origin. Political discrimination against disfavored social classes (which will be discussed more later) was loosened. This promised opportunities for education and employment for their children. This group of people became determined supporters of the NCEE with their respect for knowledge, the hope for their children, the belief in the fairness of a nationally standardized testing system, and the habitual dependency on a powerful central leadership for protection, justice, and life opportunities.

One undeclared purpose of reinstituting the NCEE was to soothe people's animosity against the government that had reached a crisis point during the Cultural Revolution. The majority of people's basic needs for food, shelter, and education had not been attended. Many grievances were illegally inflicted upon the common people by

government officials. The newly-reorganized central government restored the NCEE as the first step to strengthen the new central power and save the Party's reputation. The message was clear that the CPC Central Committee was once again the only provider of justice and gratuity for the people. The reinstitution of this system met the traditional expectations of fair distribution of opportunities, and the expectation of a wise powerful central leadership that would prevent social injustice. It was used as the best example of, as well as the best advertisement for, the Party's determination to provide equality, justice, and opportunities to all. The majority of the people applauded the return of the NCEE and the end to "going through the back door" for higher education (*Guangming ribao*, 1977; Smerling, 1978).

Characteristics of the NCEE Administration

Striking characteristics of the NCEE administration include: (1) a quota policy, (2) a marginal-number candidacy policy, (3) anonymity, (4) political discrimination, and (5) the effort to catch up with international academic standards.

The purpose of the quota policy is to provide equal opportunities to higher education to people in less-developed remote areas where a big portion of the population is composed of ethnic minority groups. The distribution of quotas is decided by the National Admission Bureau equally based on the number of high school graduates each province has annually. Quotas for national key institutions, such as Beijing University and Fudan University, must be distributed to all provinces, including the less developed areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Quotas for greater-area key institutions like Southwest Normal University must be shared by southwest provinces such as Sichuan, Yun-nan, Guizhou, and Tibet Autonomous Region. The distribution of quotas is somewhat biased, although it is roughly balanced in numbers. The more advanced provinces, such as Jiangsu and Fujian, get more quotas for national key institutions and science programs because the quality of secondary education is better there. The less advanced areas get less quotas for national key institutions or science and technology programs. The quota policy applies to

the provincial level only. It is not required that the numbers of admissions must be balanced between cities, prefectures, or counties.

The marginal-number candidacy policy serves to guarantee that there are sufficient choices for the admission officials to pick out the best candidates for admission. This policy requires that the number of candidates must be larger than the actual number of admissions. The marginal number may be 5% to 30% larger than that of the quotas for each province, depending upon the annual regulation of the SEC. Based upon the marginal number a province may have, the provincial admission bureau sets the minimum requirement of NCEE scores (the Chinese call it bottom-line scores) for admission. Examinees whose scores are at or above the bottom-line become candidates. Those who score below this level are rejected automatically. As a rule, the higher the marginal number is, the more flexibility the admission officials have in decision making.

The marginal numbers of candidates for various institutions are set based on their admission quotas respectively. For example: if Nanjing University had 20 admission quotas in X province, and if this year's marginal number were 120% (or 20% larger than the quotas), the admission representative from Nanjing University would have 24 candidates from whom to choose 20. The representative might legally reject the top four but accept the next 20 candidates with lower scores. Sometimes institution representatives might ask for more candidates. Sometimes admission bureau officials would supply more with various good reasons. This is where legal "smuggling" would happen in the admission process.

Anonymity is another important characteristic of the NCEE administration which was inherited directly from the Imperial Examination. It is mandatory to make the examination papers unidentifiable by evaluators. Anybody who violates the regulations will be severely disciplined.

Political discrimination is the most striking characteristic of the NCEE administration and thus worth more discussion. It is a product of the Marxist class struggle theory applied to the administration of higher education. It is demonstrated in two forms: class discrimination and ideological discrimination. While the two types of discrimination co-exist all the time, class discrimination was more severe from the 1950s to the 1970s. Since the 1980s the ideological "enemies" who are identified among the educated group have become the major targets of political discrimination for the Party.

The CPC has distributed opportunities to higher education based upon the Marxist class struggle theory that specifies which class has the right but which one does not. In the 1950s the college student population was mainly composed of two groups of youths: students from families of "black" classes[11] and students of CPC cadres from the People's Liberation Army or the government. In 1957, many of them, especially of the first group, were identified as bourgeois "Rightists" in the Anti-Rightist Movement. From 1958 to 1965 very few students of "black" classes were admitted. In the Cultural Revolution higher education was exclusively for the CPC cadres and their family members.

Such political discrimination has brought enormous damage to the educational development in this nation because it hurt those who are the backbone of Chinese education. Such damage is neither measurable or remediable because the political, economic and psychological sufferings are fatal for many of them. Most of those who had received some education by the 1950s are from "black" families that had financial ability for

11 After the 1949 Revolution, CPC quickly restructured the Chinese society based on Marxist class struggle theory. The Chinese people were sorted into three social groups according to their family class origins before/by 1949. Their social class identifications must be inherited by their descendants regardless of any change in their socio-economic conditions. The first group is composed of "red" classes such as the CPC cadres and their families, proletarian workers and their families, and poor-and-lower peasants and their families. The second group covers the "gray" classes, such as peddlers, craftsmen, small business employees, clerks, and middle-income peasants and their families. The third group is "black," including landlords and their families, rich peasants and their families, capitalists and their families, "Right-Wing" counterrevolutionaries and any other kind of counterrevolutionaries and their families. The red group is trustworthy for the CPC center power and the privileged group in the society. The "gray" group is considered to be worth uniting for socialist construction by the CPC. The third group must be suppressed by the red group. Most of the educated were from "black" families at that time (Chan, 1993; Mao, 1967).

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education. They have composed the majority of scientists, educators, artists, medical workers, and engineers by the 1980s in China. The Party thought that they must be deprived based on its Marxist belief. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, many of them did not have the right to work, or were put into prisons and labor camps. Many of their children were deprived of the right even to secondary education.

Not until the 1980s was this situation improved. In the years 1977, 1978, and 1979, applicants who had "black" family backgrounds were allowed to take the NCEE so long as they met the other requirements. Some of them were admitted whose NCEE scores were extraordinarily high. Since the 1980s, the class origin requirement has been put away by the government under the pressure of strong resentment from society.

However, this does not mean that political discrimination is completely stopped. Instead, it has a new focus on ideological dissents. On April 27, 1987, the SEC issued the "Regulations on Admissions to Higher Institution" to reclarify this policy:

> It is the principle that all applicants must be examined on their academic, moral, and physical qualifications before they are admitted to regular institutions of higher learning.... People who apply for higher education must uphold the Four Principles[12], love our motherland, comply with the laws and disciplines, and be determined to study hard for the modernization of our socialist motherland.... The political qualification of applicants is the most important. The following kinds of applicants must not be admitted to higher learning: those who have had speeches or actions against the Four Disciplines but are unwilling to confess and correct their wrongdoing; those who have disturbed the social order, engaged in illegal business, committed graft, theft, embezzlement, or taken part in criminal activities; and those who do not have a sound morality."
>
> (State Education Commission, 1988, pp.207-208)

After the 1989 crackdown on the student movement in Beijing, the SEC reinstituted recruiting college freshmen from "model youths" of workers, peasants, and soldiers. The

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12 The Four Principles are: " "We must persist on the socialist route; we must execute proletarian dictatorship; we must secure the Communist Party's leadership; we must follow Marxism and Mao Ze-dong Thought" (Deng, 1983, pp. 150-151). Deng also said: "The purpose of the Four Principles is to secure the Party's leadership over the nation, but the core idea of bourgeois liberalization is to overthrow the Party's leadership" (p. 346).

Chinese People's University, the most prestigious institute for CPC cadre training, took the lead in doing so. In 1991 it admitted 50 "model workers" to its "Socialist Reconstruction Program" and the "Disciplines of Marxism Program" (*Ren min ri bao*, May 30, 1991, p.4). At the Preparatory Meeting for Humanities Graduate Admissions 1992, the SCE stipulated again that political qualifications must be the first condition for admission; candidates for programs in social sciences, especially politics, must believe in Marxism; graduate advisors must be professors who believe and advocate Marxism; Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought must be required courses for programs concerned with politics (*China Education Tribune*, 1991, December 28).

The academic requirements of the NCEE reflect the institutional effort to catch up with international academic standards as a way of modernizing China especially as relates to science and technology. This may be observed in the context of the testing subjects, the range of contents, and the forms of testing.

The testing subjects of the NCEE are similar to that of the college entrance examinations in the advanced countries like Japan, Germany and France, except for the politics examination. The applicants are categorized into two groups for testing based upon their preferences of future academic-professional development: the social science group and the natural science and engineering group. By 1979, the examination subjects were politics, Chinese language and literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, geography, and foreign language (which was not a required general subject). In 1980, biology was added to the testing list. In 1984 foreign language became a required general subject of the NCEE (applicants may choose one foreign language for the examination, such as English, Japanese, French, Spanish, Russian, or German). Since 1984 the above first three subjects and foreign language have become the general testing subjects. History and geography are for applicants of social sciences and/or arts. Physics, chemistry, and biology are for applicants of natural sciences and engineering. Applicants for programs of mathematics

must be examined with the natural science and engineering group. Applicants for sports programs and arts may have the choice to take academic examinations with either group.

The range of contents for each subject cover what should have been learned during the five or six years of secondary education. In addition, a small portion of the examination questions will go beyond the range of secondary education to college level, addressing new discoveries, new theories, or issues in real life (Center for Educational Examinations, 1992b). In the 1979 NCEE Mathematics paper, there was such a 12-point question:

> "The price index of the United States increased in forty years from 100 in 1939 to 500 in 1979. If the annual rate of price increase was the same for every year, what would be the annual percentage increase? (Hint: the natural logarithm is the logarithm with its base $e = 2.718$''''. In this problem, the rate of increase is $x < 0.1$, so the approximate formula $\ln(1 + x) \approx x$ can be used. Use $\lg 2 = 0.3$ and $\ln 10 = 2.3$ for the calculation).
>
> (Seybolt, 1979b, p. 24)

The NCEE is trying to upgrade the testing methods by learning from the more advanced countries. In 1978 the first multiple-choice test paper of English as a foreign language was introduced from Japan. This method is now being applied to all NCEE written examinations. Computerized testing and evaluation is phasing in gradually.

The Orientation of Secondary Education by the NCEE

The NCEE has oriented the nation's secondary education to a great extent. Its academic requirements have been directing the academic efforts in the secondary schools. Through the testing contents it prescribes what teachers must teach and what students need to know upon graduation from high school. The Examination Committee provides the secondary schools a set of preparation outlines for the NCEE which will be renewed every few years. Because the examinations will not go beyond the outlines, they are the *de facto* guidance for the academic performance of Chinese secondary education (Seybolt, 1979a).

The NCEE has oriented the country's secondary education towards a single end of higher education. Teachers and students concentrate on what will be tested by the NCEE. Parents urge their children to learn and teachers to teach just for the NCEE but nothing else. The reward of higher education with all the benefits it promises is the unique driving force for this effort. Such orientation has caused astonishing waste of educational investment (which will be discussed later).

Strengths of the NCEE

Four major strengths are associated with this system: first, it is trusted by the people; secondly, it is effective in limiting power abuse; thirdly, it works with efficiency; fourthly, it helps raise the academic standard in the secondary schools.

The Chinese people trust this system because it meets their traditional expectation on fair practice of elite selection and opportunity sharing. Their belief in a centralized testing system has been built partly upon their cultural habituation but mostly their negative memories of the Cultural Revolution. They do not possess any other ideology than traditional centralism for answers of equality and justice, which to them means something given by a sovereignty.

The NCEE is effective in limiting power abuse in distributing educational opportunities. The public has been sensitive to government corruption on this matter, to which the central government has always responded positively. Since 1978 officials who were found guilty of corruption in NCEE have been severely punished (Sun & Zheng, 1957; *Renmin ribao--People's Daily*, 1978, Jan. 21; 1978, July 28; 1979, Aug. 7; 1979; 1979, Aug. 8; 1983, Sept. 4; 1984, April, 10; 1986, June 14). This strength comes from the totalitarianship of the CPC central government. In China educational resources have been limited. Power abuse would prevail and common people would suffer more before they gain the strength to protect themselves.

The NCEE has been the most efficient administrative machine in China. Usually in two months the whole process of testing, evaluation, and admission will be accomplished. The ratio of errors is controlled under 1.5‰ with almost all jobs done manually.

The NCEE is powerful in helping raise the academic standard in the secondary schools. The subject examinations, aside from the disgusting politics examination, prescribe the level of academic achievement that must be reached through secondary education (Ministry of Education, 1979). The number of graduates from a school who are admitted to higher learning measures the quality of the school. Such measurement has been useful in pushing schools to raise the quality of their academic work, especially in places where government supervision on academic affairs in schools has been weak.

Limits of the NCEE

Three major problems confront the NCEE system: first, it has caused great waste of educational investment; secondly, it limits the choices of both applicants and higher institutions; thirdly, it is discriminative.

The NCEE has caused lots of waste of educational investment both to the individuals and the government with its orientation of secondary education towards a single end of higher education. The capacity of Chinese higher institutions has been limited. They can only admit about one fifth of the NCEE examinees each year (while many high school graduates cannot even get a chance to take it). In 1977, out of 20 million applicants 5.7 million were permitted to take the NCEE and 0.3 million of them were admitted by higher institutions. In 1979, 0.27 million people were admitted out of about 4.6 million applicants. This situation is improved somewhat when the number of regular higher institutions has been increased by 1063 since the 1980s, while the applicant population has become smaller and more stable. In 1987 the number of admission quotas was increased to 0.59 million which was about one fifth of the NCEE applicant population of that year.

These numbers disclose the fact that most of the high school graduates have been excluded from higher education with nowhere to go. Those who are left aside without any skill to make a living become burdens to their families and to society. This educational waste has contributed to astonishing figures of unemployment around the country, because many youths have nothing to do upon leaving school as they have not been trained to do anything. Vocational education, which has been limited and looked down upon in the Chinese society, is not available for most of them (Smerling, 1978; Seybolt, 1979c; State Education Commission, 1987).

This system limits the choices of both applicants and higher institutions in mutual selection. The provincial admission bureau, representing the Party's leadership, has interfered and controlled admission decisions. The higher institutions cannot recruit students themselves or make independent admission decisions. The choices of institutions and academic programs are also limited for applicants. In additioin, applicants must sign an agreement in their applications that they will accept the admissions to any institutions or programs based on the Party's needs, although it is different from their preferences.

The NCEE has been discriminative against people with different political ideas or from different social backgrounds. It excludes people with physical disabilities. Such discriminations have deprived millions of youths of their right to higher education.

Reflections

From the Imperial Examination to the NCEE there is the contingency of political centralism that shows the political and cultural heritage in Chinese education. The two testing systems share many similarities. They are different, however, for they were designed for different purposes in different times. The two systems have served for the political needs of both the ruling classes and the commoners, although it has been limited for the latter. The Imperial Examination was once a positive force for the social

development when it was established. During the long interval it continued without any significant change, and fell far behind the times at its end (Cheng, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976; Gu, 1981). The NCEE is still functioning without much challenge, but it will soon become an obstacle for political and economic reform if it continues its role in the same way as it has been. The future of the NCEE needs to be redesigned based on what will be the best choice for the Chinese people to select their youths for higher education.

Political Centralism

The Imperial Examination and the NCEE have contributed to the continuity of political centralism through elite and higher education. The two systems have helped radiate the central control and teach political centralism over the country. Such long social, political, and educational experiences have made it an essential part of the Chinese culture. It is the way of thinking for the Chinese people. It is the only form of political regime and social norm that can be appreciated and accepted by them. To the Chinese people a hierarchic society is normal: "The emperor is the sovereign of a kingdom; the father is the master of a family" (Confucius, vols. 1, 10, in Qian, 1975, pp. 2, 50). Obedience to, and dependence upon, an authority are virtues both at home and in the society.

Such a value system has made the Chinese society a nursery of spiritual slaves and totalitarians. Almost all Chinese have the same centripetal ideology (unless they were/are raised and educated in a different social-political environment), including the ruling class, the literati, the commoners, and the illiterate people. They tend to rely on the mercy and wisdom of a "sovereignty" for spiritual and material well being. At the same time they expect the obedience of others who are ranked lower than themselves in the society (Zi Ye, 1993). When they seek social change, they deposit their hope in a "wiser" central leader who will be able to control social evils and protect their own interest. When they become leaders themselves, they will be probably as brutal and despotic as, if not more than, their ancestor totalitarians.

Very few Chinese, including the Communist leaders and those who are advocating for democracy, are immune from this cultural heritage. The CPC totalitarians, such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping who also claimed that they fought for a democratic motherland, have rebuilt modern Chinese political centralism with Marxist class struggle theory and Confucian hierarchy. The contemporary Chinese society is organized by the CPC in this way: "an individual must obey the unit; the minority must obey the majority; the lower-ranked must obey the higher-ranked; all members and branches of the Party must obey the Central Committee" (Mao, 1966, vol. 2, p. 516); and the Central Committee is under the leadership of a totalitarian figure such as Mao and Deng. Among the Chinese activists who are seeking democratizing China and thus are forced into exile in the Western countries, there have been endless struggles to establish a highly centralized and strictly hierarchical organization that will supervise and provide leadership to all Chinese organizations around the world in the Chinese pro-democratic movement (United Front for ..., 1993).

Similarities Shared by the Two Examination Systems

Eight similarities are shared by the two systems: (1) organization and administration, (2) the requirement of political qualification, (3) social and political discrimination, (4) trustworthiness for people, (5) unifying people's ideology and the social norms, (6) quota policy, (7) anonymity, and (8) placement policy.

The first similarity shared by the two systems is in their patterns of organization and administration. They both have a pyramidal structure in coherence with the power hierarchy. This similarity shows the political as well as the cultural heritage from the Imperial Examination to the NCEE.

The second similarity is in their requirements of political qualification. They both require that those who were/are selected must be ideologically identical with, and loyal to, the central power. This requirement inevitably leads to social or political discrimination.

Discrimination is the third characteristic shared by the two systems, although they have different focuses for exclusion. In the imperial time, social discrimination excluded those from the Imperial Examination who were considered not possessing ethical thoughts (Cheng, 1934; Miyazaki, 1976; GU, 1981; Elman, 1991). In contemporary China, political discrimination excludes those from the NCEE who are from politically untrustworthy families (by the CPC) or have dissenting ideas. As a matter of fact political discrimination is just a modern version of social discrimination.

The fourth similarity is that both systems are trustworthy for the majority of the Chinese people. Compared with other government agencies in China's history, they are the least corrupted but most efficient. Both of them open a door to life opportunities for commoners, although it has been limited. They have been used as symbols of equal access to opportunities which can only be provided and protected by a sovereignty. This is perhaps why political centralism has been thought indispensable by the Chinese.

The fifth similarity is in their function to unify people's ideology and the social norms with Confucian political centralism. When the rulers and the commoners relate their different interests to the same regime, political centralism becomes the only desirable means for both sides.

Quota policy was/is a grace given to the less advanced areas by the central power. In the imperial times it assured the loyalty of remote areas and the loyalty of different ethnic groups to the central power. In the contemporary China it guarantees equal opportunities to higher education for people in less-developed remote areas. However, this policy is not welcome by all today (which will be discussed later).

Anonymity is the seventh similarity. The Chinese people believe that it is the most important condition for fair evaluation. It is one of the major strengths in the two systems that has helped them win people's support.

The last similarity is in their placement policies. Those who survived in the Imperial Examinations were granted high positions and big fortune by the emperors which assured them a good life. Those who succeed in the NCEE have an assured career for the future and the warranty for life-long employment by the government. In both cases the families of the winners were/are honored and beneficiaries. This is perhaps the biggest strength in the two systems that has drawn people to rely upon a central power for life opportunities.

Differences Between the Two Examination Systems

Four major differences exist between the two examination systems: (1) the dimensions of their basic responsibilities, (2) academic requirements, (3) the people's attitude towards the quota policy, and (4) the attitudes of those who succeeded in the examinations towards the systems and the central power.

The basic responsibilities of the two systems are different. The Imperial Examination was to select officials for civil services. The NCEE is to select students for higher education. The latter is an educational testing system but the former was not.

The academic requirements of the two systems are totally different. In the Imperial Examinations academic excellence was best shown when the examinees mirrored the Confucian concepts and followed the rigid rules of composition. Confucian classics were the only materials for testing and there was no place for science and technology. Many scholars, especially the Chinese ones quoted in the previous pages, consider this problem as the deadly curse of this system. In the NCEE, the testing contents cover almost all subject areas of modern secondary education. Its academic requirements are powerful instruments to drive the schools to catch up with international academic standards. Such academic guidance by the central government is still necessary in China because many local governments either do not have the ability to do so, or simply do not care about it.

The third difference is in people's attitudes towards the quota policies. The quota policy worked in the imperial time to help the emperors control the country and there was not much complaint about it recorded by historians. But the NCEE quota policy has caused many grievances especially in the more advanced provinces such as Jiangsu and Fujian. In these more advanced areas many applicants with high NCEE scores cannot be admitted because quotas are too restrictive, while their counterparts with much lower scores can enter even a prestigious university in Beijing from a remote province such as Xinjiang and Tibet. However, this policy has not been much help for the social development in the less-developed remote areas because many of those who have benefited from it will not return to their hometowns upon graduation from university. This situation has caused much anguish in the more advanced provinces (Shu, 1985; Ye, 1985; Tong, 1985).

The fourth difference is in the attitudes of those who benefited/have benefited from the two systems. The officials selected through the Imperial Examination were loyal to the emperors; few of them ever rebelled against their royal master. But the graduates from today's higher institutions rarely feel grateful for anything including the free higher education provided by the government. They hate the government placement policy because it does not allow them to choose what to be or where to live. Many of those who are well-educated and considered pillars of society do not really have much sense of social responsibility because they do not even have the opportunity to gain the experience of taking responsibilities for their own lives. The "no-returns" problem the Chinese government has in financing students and scholars to study abroad reflects this deficiency in Chinese higher education. Few of them paid back the government financial aid as required when they refused to return and serve for the motherland for just two years. They applied for permanent residency in the Western countries because of the June Fourth Crackdown of the student movement 1989 in Beijing, in which very few of them had participated (Feng, 1991, 1992; Tong, 1993; Wang, 1993; Xiao, 1993).

The Future of the NCEE

The NCEE remains unchallenged in the present economic and political reform movement which is also calling for educational reform. Small-scale experiments are going on to charge for higher education and discard the government placement and life-long employment systems in the cities of the more advanced areas, such as Beijing, Nanjing and Guangzhou (Liu & Lin, 1994; Chinese Business Times, 1994). But nobody has really challenged the authority of the NCEE in selecting students for higher education since its reinstitution. Following its model more centralized testing services are established by the Center for Educational Examinations of the SEC, such as the National Middle School Teacher Certification Examinations, the Examinations for Overseas Applicants, and the National Graduate Admission Examinations (State Education Commission, 1987).

A few suggestions have risen to "reform" the NCEE. Some educational administrators, researchers, and professors are advocating making the NCEE more centralized with a nationally unified bottom-line scores requirement for admission, and making unified admissions by a single government agency. They think that this will achieve fairness and equality, and that it will fill the gap between the academic preparations of students admitted from different areas (Shu, 1985; Ye, 1985; Tong, 1985). Some of them suggest that China's education return to the Imperial Examination model so that "students study the courses in the privacy of their homes, but the examinations and credit certifications are handled by the government" (Xu & Tang, 1990, p. 64). These suggestions cannot lead to real reform of this system but make it more centralized and rigid than ever.

There is no doubt that the NCEE needs real reform. It is an important part of the higher education system that must be made compatible with the social development of the day. But this will not necessarily mean that it must be discarded, although it should not be

used as the only approach for the purpose of recruitment. Its organization and administration need reform. Some of its functions must be stopped, improved, or changed.

The NCEE cannot be stopped at the present time. This is because this nation still needs it and the need will continue for a long time. The financial burden will be enormous on both the applicants and the institutions if all the institutions give independent tests to recruit students themselves. Besides, power abuse and corruption will prevail again before the officials are taught to become trustworthy. The grimmer fact is that few officials from the central to the local governments understand the importance of supporting education in the present economic reform. They take school buildings for business usage, cut off teachers' salaries and school expenditures, eliminating education as a burden (Qian, 1992). Under such circumstances, it is critical for the nation to have the central government support education, including financing schools and supervising their academic works.

It is instructive for the Chinese people to know that in some highly advanced nations such as France and Japan there is the tradition that the central government support and supervise education. In the United States the state governments are the provider of poblic education. This does not mean that their schools cannot have administrative freedom and academic freedom. In Japan's history it was the central power that supported and pushed education reform, and set up such a strong educational foundation for that country as we see today (National Institute..., 1978).

The NCEE organization and administration need reform. It should become a pure educational testing service and its function should be limited to providing academic assessment only. It will be responsible to provide and supervise academic examinations and evaluation. Its structure and administration must be simplified. The huge four-level structure of the present NCEE system may be reduced to two levels, with the city/prefecture and county admission offices closed. The center office for the NCEE will prepare examination papers and send it to schools which will conduct the examinations for

it. The admission bureaus at the provincial level will do the evaluation job because technically it is impossible for the center to process the evaluation for the whole nation at the present time. The provincial bureaus will notify examinees their scores directly, who will decide themselves which institutions to apply based on their own scores and interests. The institutions will admit students themselves based on their own criteria and notify applicants their decisions in a fixed time period. In a long run the provincial admission bureaus will phase out when the evaluation process is computerized and the NCEE center can handle it itself.

The higher institutions must have the right to administer independent entrance examinations themselves based on their own criteria if they wish so. Applicants may apply to take the NCEE or the independent examinations or both. Applicants must have the right to choose where to send their test scores for admission considerations while the institutions should have the right to verify the authenticity of the information. The technical arrangement of such changes will not be difficult as the means of communication is quickly improved today.

The changes of the NCEE suggested above will not bring more opportunities of higher education to the Chinese people unless the whole higher education system is changed. Higher education is suffering from rigid administration, political suppression, and lack of financial resources, faculty, and facilities. Most of the technologic, scientific, and arts education equipment is inadequate and outdated. Some universities are cutting off the number of freshmen they want to admit because of financial problems (Xinhua News Agency, 1994). The administrators are complaining that it is getting more and more difficult to place their graduates.

Higher education must not be free for anybody any more. Government loans for higher education must be established and made available for everybody, which must be returned by the borrowers upon graduation or leaving school. Different scholarships may

be set by various social agencies to encourage academic excellence, creation, and innovation. This does not mean that the government will be free from the responsibility of providing financial support to higher education. Government support to education must be strengthened at all levels. Public education at primary and secondary levels must be free for all people and the government must take full responsibility to support it. The government must not interfere school administration.

Higher education must be disconnected with the life-long employment and the government placement systems. The two systems must be discarded if higher education really wants to get rid of the bondages and gain independence. Such a break up will help the Chinese elite gain independence and cultivate a new ideology from the beginning of their elite training. When they have the right as well as the responsibility to decide what their lives should be, they will perform more positively their roles and contribute more to the society. The government will not need to worry about the placement of professionals in remote areas because people will go where they are wanted according to the law of competition (Feng, 1992; Hua, 1992; Xu, 1993).

The central government must encourage local governments and private organizations to establish new higher institutions, whether they are public ones, private ones, or of foreign ownership. The development of college-level vocational education must be given special support by the governments. It is the more practical approach for many people to obtain higher education and useful life skills. Moreover, it will provide a quality working force in a short period of time.

The whole higher education system has to change, but such a reform will not be easy. In the present economic reform much of the resistance against discontinuing the life-long employment system and government placement policy come from the elite group, the "becoming elite" college students, and those who fear losing the benefits. This is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to overcome in the reform.

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